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U.S. launches Mengele probe

By Glen Elsasser
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WASHINGTON—The Justice Department said Wednesday it is starting an investigation into the whereabouts of Dr. Josef Mengele, the Nazi war criminal known as the "Angel of Death" at the Auschwitz concentration camp in World War II.

In a rare evening meeting with reporters at his office, Atty. Gen. William French Smith said the Pentagon and the CIA had pledged their full support to the probe by the department's Office of Special Investigations [OSI].

"The investigation will seek to compile all credible evidence on the current whereabouts of Mengele as well as information concerning his movements in occupied Germany and his suspected flight to South America," Smith said.

Smith and Neal Sher, the OSI's director, said the department

would be working closely with the Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies. In calling for a federal investigation last month, the center claimed it had government documents showing that Mengele may have been arrested and then released by U.S. authorities in Vienna in 1947.

Reportedly among the documents, which were obtained through the Freedom of Information Act, is a 1947 letter by an Army counterintelligence officer that mentions Mengele's possible release.

Smith said the investigation would resolve a number of allegations, such as whether Mengele ever got help from U.S. officials or actually visited the U.S. "on one or more occasions." Smith mentioned one report of Mengele's having been seen on a plane in Miami.

Asked whether there was any evidence Mengele is alive, the at-

torney general said, "There are enough allegations out there to warrant this investigation." Smith also refused to say what the U.S. would do if it found Mengele or learned that U.S. officials had helped him elude authorities.

Mengele has been accused of ordering the murder of 400,000 Jews at Auschwitz and of performing medical experiments on people there.

Until the mid-1960s Mengele lived openly in Argentina, representing a Bavarian farm-machinery firm managed by his brother. He was later granted citizenship in Paraguay, and many accounts say he is there, but Paraguayan officials deny it.

Sher said his office, which was created in 1979 by a Congress outraged by charges that Nazi war criminals were living in the U.S., had not yet contacted Paraguay.

"The investigation will be thorough and will be as speedy as possible," Smith promised.